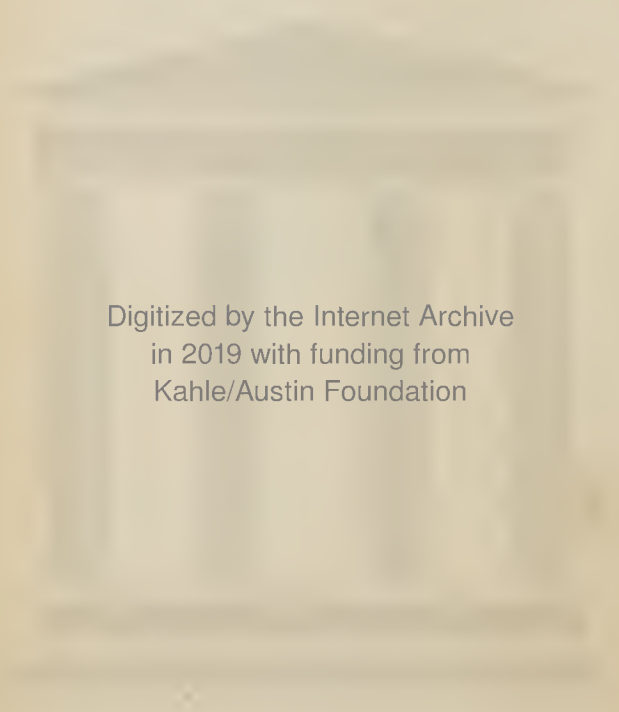


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BLANAID:

AND OTHER

IRISH HISTORICAL

AND

LEGENDARY POEMS

FROM THE GAELIC.

By

T. D. SULLIVAN.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE contents of this volume are renderings of old Irish tales into English verse; literal translation is not attempted.

In "Blanaid" I have closely followed the outline of the story given in the Rev. Geoffrey Keatinge's History of Ireland. The full Gaelic text is in the "Leabher Buidhe Lecain," or "Yellow Book of Lecain" in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. The tale is also known as the Death of Curoi, sometimes spelled Conrigh and Curigh, all which names have the same signification. The incidents are said to have happened in the reign of Connor Mac Nessa, King of Ulster, shortly before the commencement of the Christian Era.

Cuchullin is the great hero of the Irish tales of chivalry. Accounts of his feats and adventures are numerous, and are set forth in the most glowing style of the Irish bards and historians. The “Creabh Ruadh” was an Irish knightly order. The descriptions given of their warlike prowess and accomplishments are exaggerated even to the point of impossibility, but that the order had a real existence is regarded as a matter of historic certainty.

The palace-fort of “Emania”—a Latinised form of the Irish name “Emhain Macha”—stood within a few miles of the site now occupied by the City of Armagh. It was founded by the warrior-queen Macha about 350 years before the birth of our Lord, and existed until the year 331 of the Christian Era, when it was destroyed in a local war. Its ruins, now grass-grown mounds, are easily distinguishable, and of their identity no doubt is entertained. Cathair Curoi—the fort of Curoi, King of West Munster—was situated on a hill about three miles to the west of the present town of Tralee, Co. Kerry,

and some traces of it still remain. The "Dundelgan" of Cuchullin's time is now the town of Dundalk. Sulchoid, where Cuchullin overtook Curoi and Blanaid in their southward flight, retains its name, slightly disguised, in Sollyhead, near the town of Tipperary. The island of Mana, or Manan, is the present Isle of Man. After its invasion by Cuchullin and his knights, an Irish colony appear to have settled there. At a later period, subsequent to the conversion of the Irish people to Christianity, a dispute is said to have arisen between Scotland and Ireland as to the ownership of this little isle which lies about midway between them. It was agreed to decide the question by trying whether snakes would live there. When it was found that they could, there was no resisting the conclusion that the place did not come within the scope of St. Patrick's expulsory decree, and consequently that it could not be regarded as Irish ground.

The story of "Ailleen and Baille" may be read in Professor O'Curry's "Manuscript

Materials of Ancient Irish History.” “The Lay of Ossian on Tir na n-og” (The Land of Youth) is published—both the Gaelic text and a literal translation—in the Transactions of the Ossianic Society for the year 1856. One or two episodes of the journey to Tir na n-og which lengthen and encumber the narrative are omitted from the version given in the present volume.

T. D. S.

BLANAID.

BLANAID.

THE COUNCIL.

CUCHULLIN spoke :—" It ill beseems

The Red Branch Knights to linger here,
Midst sports, and games, and pleasant dreams,
And fair Emania's boundless cheer.

Swift goes the chase o'er hill and dale,

The banquet brings a merry throng,

Grand is the bard's inspiring tale

And sweet the minstrel's thrilling song :

But not in scenes like these to shine,

And not to prize such gentle charms,

Have sons of Rury's hero line

Been deftly schooled in arts and arms.

And not for games and revellings
Did Macha plan these royal halls,
And set the captive sons of kings
To hew their beams and build their walls.

Say, noble knights—and freely speak—
Where may we find our fond desire,
Such toils and joys as heroes seek
Whose hearts for fame are all on fire ? ”

A warrior by the board arose—
“ O chief, he said, you speak aright ;
We’ve waited long for words like those
With which you’ve warmed our blood to-night.

They well befit Subhailte’s son
And Cullin’s bold and faithful Cu,
Whose great career, so well begun,
Will ever be to honour true ;

Who nobly chose, when choose he might,
Between a life, long, calm, and tame,
And one of action, brief, but bright,
With, at its close, eternal fame.”

Another rose and said, "I know

Where what we crave we soon may find—

A lovely land, a valiant foe,

And brilliant spoils of every kind.

Off Alba's coast an island lies,

From hence not many leagues away—

No fairer scene by mortal eyes

Was ever looked on, night or day.

There luscious fruits bow down the trees,

The fields are speck'd with glossy kine,

In streams loved by the odorous breeze

The plenteous salmon leap and shine.

From copse and wood the deer peep out

And move with slow and stately grace;

They never know the rush, the rout,

Or hear the music of the chase.

Its king—a churl in mind and mood—

Thinks only how to grasp and hoard;

No strangers on his halls intrude,

No friend grows merry at his board.

No love has he from old or young,
And if his bards must sing his praise
'Tis ever with a faltering tongue,
Their hearts are never in their lays.

The Cathair where he dwells, 'tis true,
Is well defended, stout and strong,
And those who would its guards subdue
Must fight a battle fierce and long.

But oh, the treasures past compare
Its halls and rooms and casements hold !
The rings, the cups, the carvings rare,
The gems, the silver, and the gold !

And oh, the prize, first, loveliest, best,
The princess fair, the peerless maid,
Worth all, and more than all, the rest,
'The bright and beautiful Blanaid !

Like snow her hands and neck are white,
As apple-blooms her face is fair,
And like a stream of sunny light
Comes rippling down her golden hair.

The song-birds slant their pretty heads
And sing with joy to see her pass ;
The flowers salute her ; where she treads
There comes a brightness on the grass.

O'er land and sea for many a mile
Come kings and chiefs in stately ships,
Their hope—to win one loving smile
From her blue eyes and rosy lips.

But woo and worship as they may
Their toils and tears are all in vain,
And o'er the shining seas away
With heavy hearts they sail again.

Not so, Cuchullin, will it be
If once those bright eyes look on you,
The flower of Erin's chivalry,
The glory of the great Creabh Ruah !”

Cuchullin rose, his face aglow
With all a warrior's joy and pride—
“ Enough,” he said : “ forthwith we go,
Even now my heart has crossed the tide.

“ Fill up your goblets, noble knights,
Clasp hand in hand, and pledge with me
Our coming time of grand delights,
I drink—Blanaid and Victory !”

They struck their shields upon the walls,
Loud, clear, and sweet the echoes rang,
The clash of harps went through the halls
And wild with joy the Fileas sang—

“ The spell of idle sports is o’er,
Far worthier scenes are soon to be ;
Cuchullin grasps his spear once more,
We sing—Blanaid and Victory !”

THE EXPEDITION.

A BRIGHT and busy scene to-day
Is fair Dundelgan's tranquil bay :
Resplendant on its silvery tide
Cuchullin's galleys proudly ride,
With flapping sails, and silken sheen
Of pennants yellow, blue, and green,
And spacious holds, where many a load
Of warlike stores will soon be stowed.
On land, too, all is bustling life,
With many sounds the air is rife ;
Wood-workers shape from pine and ash
Great beams through walls and gates to crash,
Stout planks whereon a host may cross
O'er bristling trench and slimy fosse,

Strong wheels, and poles, and other aids
To help the work of spears and blades.
There too the anvils sweetly sound
'Twixt heavier strokes that shake the ground,
While brawny smiths with strokes amain
Forge bar, and wedge, and massive chain,
All needed for the high emprise
That now before the Red Branch lies.
High craftsmen, skilled beyond the rest,
Try spear and shield by many a test,
Try sword, and sling, and casting-stone,
That fault or flaw may lurk in none
To peril in the deadly strife
The wielder's, not the foeman's, life.
In shining groups the knights meanwhile
Pass to and fro with kindly smile,
Or practice, in some pleasant dell,
The agile feats they know so well,
And draw from all beholders there
The fond applause they love to hear.

The ships have got their various stores,
The rowers, seated, grasp their oars ;

The knights, assembled on the strand,
But wait the word to quit the land,
When pressing towards the chief is seen
A clumsy man of humble mein ;
Advancing with a shambling pace,
Garbed in a suit of homely gray,
He seems to wish to hide his face
And just finds words enough to say—

“ Illustrious chief, of chiefs the best,
Oh, hear, and grant me one request.
I’ve laboured hard and laboured long,
My thews are tough, my back is strong ;
Such aiders, in a little while
You’ll need on Manan’s lovely isle.
Give me a place among your crew,
The roughest work I’ll gladly do
And let no lowly tasks assoil
The hands made fit for nobler toil.
Thus even I, poor witless wight,
If all unworthy of the fight,
May help you to your heart’s delight.”

Cuchullin answered, "Be it so!"
On board the bright battalions go;
The sails are spread, the oars are plied,
Away to sea the galleys glide;
While backward to Dundelgan's shores,
Mixed with the pulsing sound of oars
The evening breezes bear along
In dying tones the harper's song:—

SONG.

CUCHULLIN'S ships are on the sea;
They bear his gallant company—
 Blow, friendly breezes, blow!
No freight more precious ever press'd
Upon the ocean's heaving breast—
 Row, sturdy oarsmen, row!

For, warriors skilful, bold, and true.
Are best of all things, old or new—
 Blow, friendly breezes, blow!
And here have we the noblest band
That ever graced a glorious land—
 Row, sturdy oarsmen, row!

And here is he, the chief who leads
That matchless troupe to mighty deeds—
 Blow, friendly breezes, blow !
To him and them be good and kind
O Sun and Moon, O Waves and Wind—
 Row, sturdy oarsmen, row !

THE SIEGE.

THE shore is gained, but to the sands
The warriors scarce have time to spring,
When on a rock before them stands
A herald from the angry king.

With gestures wild and threatening speech
He warns them from the isle away,
And tells what fate for all and each
Awaits them if they dare to stay.

Far mightier hosts their task have tried,
The end for all was just the same—
Dishonour quenched their foolish pride,
Their gains were wounds and death and
shame.

But never yet was such defeat
 Inflicted on a vaunting foe
As they to-day will march to meet
 If onward to the fort they go.
“Hush, babbling fool!” Cuchullin said,
 And mustering all his proud array,
With merry laugh and martial tread
 For Manan’s fort they take their way.

Through pleasant woods, and verdant vales,
 and flower-bespangled meads
Cuchullin’s joyful company go gaily where he
 leads;
But short had been their merry march when
 with delighted eyes
They saw the Cathair’s mighty bulk stand clear
 against the skies.
Three massive ramparts ringed it round, deep
 trenches ran between,
Upon their sides thick rows of stakes, spike-
 headed, could be seen.
A great broad fosse encircled all, filled by the
 ocean tide,

A bulky ship might pass throughout, so deep it
was and wide.

The chief defence of all was where the chariot-
entrance lay ;

Great rocks and weighty beams were there with
which to bar the way ;

And in the midst, close by the gate, set on by
cunning sails,

A huge wheel whirled keen-bladed scythes and
ponderous iron flails

Whose strokes would fell a mighty host and
smite them on the plain

Even as a burly peasant beats and threshes out
his grain.

And well, full well, the warriors knew that on
from mound to mound

Fresh obstacles would quickly rise, fresh perils
would be found,

And that within the central court, and round
the midmost dun

The fiercest fight would roar and rage 'till all
was lost or won ;

For there the king's own hall was placed, and
there were strongly stored

The treasures bright that, day and night, it
joyed his heart to hoard,
And there, high up o'er all the works for war
or pleasure made,
Within her peaceful sun-room dwelt the beautiful
Blanaid.

Cuchullin's knights were bold and brave, but
just as brave were they
Who swarming from the fort came out to meet
their fierce array ;
Light darts the forces first exchanged that sped
in rapid flights
Like the quick rush of shooting stars on clear
November nights
Some rattled on the bossy shields, some glanced
and slipped aside,
Some found the glowing breasts of men and
loosed the crimson tide.
Still forward pressed the hostile hosts, and
slowly drawing near,
The work was now with cleaving sword and
deadly-thrusting spear.

To cheer his men with kindly words, with
counsel and command,
From point to point Cuchullin moved, and
plied his battle brand;
Wherever close-contending groups with war-din
filled the air
He dashed into the midst, and soon the strife
was ended there.
Where'er he saw a Manan chief his weapons
deftly wield,
He sought him out, and soon the foe lay lifeless
on the field.
And as he wrought his hero-deeds in rich array
bedight,
His broad chest heaving, his blue eyes with
battle-glory bright,
His fair hair flowing o'er his neck, his youthful
face aglow,
No grander sight was ever seen; so said both
friend and foe.

From her high sun-room in the dun Blanaid
 beheld the scene,
Saw warriors strike and heroes fall, and blood-
 gouts blot the green :
There was a horror in the sight, but some
 strange charm withal
Kept her eyes straining to the fight, and held
 her heart in thrall.
Amazed she saw that youthful chief, so hand-
 some and so bold,
And when his times of peril came she felt her
 blood run cold ;
Then when she saw him victor still, unhurt,
 without a stain,
A pleasure thrill went through her heart and
 made it throb again ;
And oft, prone on her silken couch, she
 pondered mournfully
On how and when the strife would end, and
 what her fate would be.

Day after day the fight went on, but yet no
 moat or mound

The knights had crossed, nor had they gained
one single foot of ground.

The green sword drank their noble blood as if
'twere summer rain,

Their ranks were thinned by wounds and death
all borne and met in vain.

'Twere better all should perish there than turn
in base retreat—

But oh, to think the Red Branch Knights
should know such dire defeat !

To think that such a dismal tale, unlike the
tales of old,

Should in Emania's glorious halls with bated
breath be told !

To think that any work of war linked with
Cuchullin's name

Should bring to Irish hearts a pang of sorrow
or of shame !

Perplexed and sad beneath a tree the youthful
chieftain sate,

His wisest captains gathered round for council
and debate :

Each spoke his mind, but none set forth a
hopeful plot or plan
To gain the end for which they came, when lo !
the gray clad man !
Into their midst he roughly strode, and said
“ O chief, to you
I promised help on Erin’s shore, I’ll prove my
promise true.
By secret arts and magic powers, ere evening’s
shadows fall
I’ll make you master of the fort: its every
court and hall
With all they hold shall then be yours, if you
will but agree
To let me choose from out the spoil—my sole
reward to be—
One jewel only; but I ask for solemn pledge
and sign
No chief or knight shall claim the same; that
treasure must be mine.”

“ I swear the pact,” Cuchullin said, “ by Sun
and Moon and Wind :

I give you every honour-pledge that noble knights can bind."

"We swear it too!" the knights exclaimed;

"now comrades, up, away,

To gain the prize that shall be won ere comes the close of day!"

The gray-clad man led on, and soon his Danaan spells and charms

Made dim his foemen's sight, and took the vigour from their arms;

The Manan spears flew wild and wide, and scarce would pierce the ground,

The murderous wheel no longer whirled its blades and bars around;

One shout the bright battalion raised, one rush to gain the dun,

When wild with dread its guardians fled, the Manan fort was won.

THE SHARING OF THE SPOILS.

UPON Emania's spacious green
Again the Red Branch Knights are seen ;
A merry mood is theirs to-day,
For now comes on the bright display
Of spoils and trophies late brought o'er
From Manan's isle to Erin's shore ;
And now before delighted eyes
Will many a gift and well-won prize
Be given by Cuchullin's hand
To heroes of his noble band.

Brightest and gayest of the throng
Cuchullin moved his knights among,
His form a type of manly grace,
A joy-light on his happy face,

His garb a glory to behold
Of purple cloth, and braids of gold,
Of plaited linen, richly dyed,
With belts and straps of yellow hide,
With light lace fringes, white as milk,
And sash of flowered and figured silk,
All fixed and set with special care,
And worn with such a conscious air
Of pride, as never until now
Sat radiant on his manly brow.

The horns were blown, and at their call
The heroes thronged into the hall.
The Manan spoils were gathered there,
A glorious mass to see—and share.
Leaf-bladed swords, spears keen and fine,
Shields wrought with many a quaint design,
Stout armour-suits to stop the darts
Sped by strong arms at manly hearts,
Gold collars, brooches, clasps, and rings,
To shine upon the robes of kings,
And precious stones, and trinkets rare
Of brightest hues, for women's wear.

There too was she, "the brightest, best,
The prize worth more than all the rest,
The Princess fair, the peerless maid,
The bright and beautiful Blanaid,"
And, beaming with delight and pride,
Cuchullin seated by her side.

He said, "My comrades brave and true,
Companions of the great Creabh Ruah,
I've called you here to share with me
The sweets and spoils of victory,
To keep the faith I pledged before
We left Dundelgan's pleasant shore.
But first I call the man in gray
Who in that dark and doubtful day
When all our toil seemed spent in vain,
Cheered up our hearts and hopes again,
And by great feats, and secrets known
To him, and unto him alone,
The arts and engines overcame
That nearly wrought us grief and shame.
I pledged my faith, and yours, that he
From out the glittering heaps you see,

Might choose for his especial prize
The jewel fairest in his eyes.
I bid him make that choice to-day
And no man here shall say him nay."

The gray-clad man stepped from the crowd,
Thrice to the chief his head he bowed ;
Beside Blanaid he took his stand
And gently clasped her dainty hand—
" This is the jewel of my choice,"
He said in strong but broken voice,
" I claim it as my promised right,
By knightly faith, by honour bright,
By oath and pledge, by bond and sign,
This jewel is and shall be mine !"

A roar of rage went through the hall,
" A shameful trick " cried one and all.
Cuchullin rose with angry frown
As though to smite the varlet down ;
But honour's law still ruled his breast—
The clown had entered as a guest,

And as he came, so should he go,
Without a wound, a bruise, or blow :

But thus he spoke :—

“ O wicked knave,
You but abuse the pledge I gave :
Full well you know 'twas never meant
To cover your most vile intent,
And worse than foolish you must be
To think on such a paltry plea
To take the bright Blanaid from me.
My pledge is good and binding still,
Of gems or gold take what you will,
But with them or without, I say,
Quit you this hall and haste away
Unharm'd, unchallenged, while you may.”

With sullen eyes and brow of gloom
The gray man passed from out the room.
When that ill-omened form was gone
The pleasant work went gaily on
'Till sunset's gold and purple dyes
Were splendouring all the western skies,

And evening airs blew cool and bland
As shadows deepened o'er the land.
Then from the palace to the plain
The stately knights trooped forth again,
And sauntering over vale and lea
In little groups of two and three,
Talked all the day's proceedings o'er,
And laughed and wondered more and more
At the wild words, the foolish plan,
The daring of the gray-clad man.

So passed the hours till o'er them burned
The midnight stars, when all returned
To seek the sound and sweet repose
That nature freely grants to those
Who love to spend laborious days
In daring deeds and manly ways.
But ere they neared the outer wall
A tale to shock them, and appal,
In whispered words went quickly round—
Blanaid was nowhere to be found !
Blanaid the bright, Blanaid the fair,
Had vanished, none knew how or where !

All quest was vain : the stricken chief
Was wild with rage, was bowed with grief,
And, filled with tender sympathy,
His knights were sad and fierce as he.
One moment's thought, and all too well
The crowd of sorrowing men could tell
Whose was the power, whence came the blow
That wrought them all this cruel woe.
They thought of him whom, yestermorn,
They hunted from the hall with scorn,
And who ere now had shown his skill
By magic feats to work his will.
No clown was he, uncouth, unwise,
But some great hero in disguise ;
And though the words were sad to say,
 And though the very thought was pain,
Too sure it seemed their chief or they
 Would never see Blanaid again.



THE PURSUIT.

ERE yet the sky was tinted by morning's ruddy
glow

The Red Branch Knights assembled to chase
the robber foe.

In three great bands divided, they quickly
issued forth,

One eastward and one westward, the other
towards the north ;

The southern course Cuchullin preferred him-
self to tread

As if some instinct told him the way the knave
had sped.

With scarce one moment's waiting two steeds
of nimble pace

Brought up his shining chariot to bear him
from the place ;

Its ashen frame, high polished, with gold was
barred and bound,
On oak wheels, ringed with silver, it lightly
touched the ground ;
Sharp spikes and blades projecting were set on
either side
To cut through clustering foemen a passage
clear and wide,
Even as a stalwart reaper through fields of
yellowing wheat
Brings down their bristling glories in swathes
about his feet.
There sat, equipped and ready, his trusty
charioteer,
Whose hand was strong and steady, whose eye
was quick and clear,
The faithful Leagh, in many a trying hour
proved true
And good a knight as any in all the great
Creabh Ruah.
A frock of yellow deerskin was belted round
his waist,
A bright-hued cloak above it his manly shoulders
graced.

He placed upon his forehead the badge of
burnished gold

That marked the noble office it was his pride
to hold,

With his left hand he fingered the reins, held
straight and tight,

A slender switch of hazel he flourished in his
right.

In stepped Cuchullin gently ; one urging-word
from Leagh

And quick his willing coursers went Munster-
wards away.

Full many a league they travelled, close watch-
ing, day and night,

For signs and marks to show them the robber's
line of flight,

'Till on the lands of Sulchoid, not far in front,
they spied

The gray man in his chariot with Elanaid by
his side.

"Now, Leagh" exclaimed the chieftain, "put
on your quickest pace,

Let not the villian foil us and give us fresh
disgrace ;

Whip up your steeds to fury ; on, faster, faster
yet,
Till face to face confronted the clown and I
have met.
Full well I know this combat my utmost skill
will try,
But it shall be decisive, for he or I must die.
Observe me in the battle ; if pleased with what
you see,
Speak not a word of boasting, give out no
shout for me ;
But if a slow, unskilful, and feeble fight I
wage,
Then taunt me, and revile me, and sting me
into rage ;
That so with added venom in every thrust and
blow,
And all the strength of madness, I may assail
my foe.”
Leagh gave the wished-for promise, but soon
the fight was o’er ;
The gray man fought and conquered by magic
arts once more.

He laid the Ulster chieftain nigh lifeless on the
ground,
To mock him and to shame him his hands and
feet he bound,
And, still more cruel insult—the worst that
could be known—
He clipped his flowing ringlets, he sheared
them to the bone,
And taking as a trophy one silken shining braid,
His southward way resuming, went forward
with Blanaid.

THE ELOPEMENT.

FAR up in Ulster, in a desert place,
Midst a dark wood where mortals seldom
came,

Cuchullin dwelt to mourn his sore disgrace
And let time heal the tokens of his shame.
The faithful Leagh, who brought him there to
hide,
Cared for his wounds, and all his wants supplied.

The months worked wonders as they moved
along ;

Soon from his features passed the shade of
care,
Once more his eye was bright, his arm was
strong,
And his head wore its wealth of golden hair ;

But in his heart still lurked a secret pain
For honours lost, that should be won again.

From thence at length the comrades took their
way

By pleasant paths to travel Erin through,
In simple guise, devoid of all display :

Their names or station none who met them
knew.

Southward they went, through many a glorious
scene

Of waving woods, bright lakes, and vallies
green.

No battle-gear upon their breasts they wore,

No spears they brought, no life-protecting
shields ;

With hunters' blades they slew the fangéd boar,

With darts they pierced the small game of the
fields ;

While oft Cuchullin, with unerring sling

Smote prowling beasts, and wild birds on the
wing.

So journeyed they till opened into view,
 Spreading far westward till it touched the skies,
The great wide ocean, silent, bright, and blue,
 A welcome vision to their eager eyes ;
More near, uprising from the wave-lapped strand,
Rough mountains ranges stretched on either
 hand.

Upon the summit of a neighbouring hill
 A stately Cathair showed its massive form,
Planned, built, and garnished with consummate
 skill
 To bear the stress of battle's wildest storm.
But pleasant places did the fort surround,
Bright flowery fields, deep glens, and wooded
 ground.

No need had they, though strangers, to be told
 Who was the dweller in that royal dun ;
'Twas great Curoi, the skilful and the bold,
 King of South Munster, Darra's mighty son,
Famed far and near ; his people's pride and
 boast,
A peerless champion and a generous host.

Cuchullin strayed into the sylvan scene

Midst moss-clad rocks and odour-giving
flowers,

Through shady groves, and nooks where ivy
green

Hung lightly trailed o'er rest-inviting bowers.

He sate him down, sweet memories touched his
heart,

And to his eyes he felt hot teardrops start.

There mused he, grieving, gazing into space,

'Till, not far off, he deemed that he could see
A woman's form, an unforgotten face—

Some fond and wild illusion could it be?

He rose and followed where he saw her pass
By winding ways, across the velvet grass.

She too seemed pensive; moodily and slow

She paced along, with ever downcast eyes;
She turned to tread her homeward path, when,
oh!

The shock of joy! the thrill of glad surprise!
One moment more, and in a leafy shade
Kissed, clasped, and wept Cuchullin and Blanaid.

Then, broken oft by words of dear delight,
 She told a tale of sorrow and of joy;
How the gray clown who foiled him in the fight
 And bore her off, was here, the king, Curoi;
But how he failed, with all his art, to kill
Her love for *him*, alive and glowing still.

Then came the anxious question, when and how
 To end her thralldom and renew their bliss;
Escape, they knew, could not be ventured now,
 The best attempt would surely end amiss:
But woman's wit came quickly to her aid,
And cold and crafty was the plot she laid.

“Depart,” she said, “and on the hundredth day
 Return, and wait a certain sign from me;
I'll win Curoi to send his troops away
 On some vain quest; and on some cunning
 plea
I'll take his weapons from each hook and stand
Where aye he keeps them ready to his hand.

This done, I'll send you thus my trusty sign—
 A stream runs hence into the vale below,

I'll pour at once the milk of many kine

Into its waves, and when the whitened flow
Shall glad your eyes, know that your way is clear
And on for love and vengeance hasten here."

As it was plotted, so the scheme was sped ;

Cuchullin journeyed to his northern land,
There dwelt a space, then, turning, southward led
Of his brave knights a picked and chosen
band,

And with them waited in the Munster vale
For the bright stream to tell its welcome tale.

The message came, the token sure and true ;

On to the fort the eager chieftain ran,
Brief was the combat, for its guards were few
And his fierce knights could meet them man
to man.

Fast fell his foes, till, when the dun was gained
One living man, the king, alone remained.

He sought and found him where Blanaid had
kept

Her master helpless, in inglorious ease ;

Unheeding all the storm of war he slept,
His heavy head reclining on her knees.
Cuchullin roused him with a sudden start
And ran his red sword quickly through his heart.

Then ho ! for Ulster ! off without delay
In joyful mood the happy lovers went ;
No dangers now lay darkling in their way,
No king or clown could bar their fond intent.
For Ulster ho ! and midst its mountains brown
A life of love, of pleasure, and renown !

THE BARD'S VENGEANCE.

OF all throughout his wide domain
Who mourned the king, so foully slain
Old Ferkertne, his bard-in-chief,
Was stricken with the sorest grief.
At times he sorrowed like a child,
Again, he raved distraught and wild ;
With frenzied eyes, and flowing hair,
He sang, and wept, and filled the air
With plaintive sighs and woful moans,
And then in louder, fiercer tones
He stormed and muttered threateningly
Of vengeance, sure and soon to be.

One evening in the lonely hall
Where oft his lays had pleased the king,

He took his wild harp from the wall

And thus the bard was heard to sing :—

“ I weep for the kindest of masters, of heroes
the bravest and best,

I mourn with a burden of sorrow that never will
pass from my breast,

I grieve for a king who was glorious, unmatched
as a friend or a foe,

A champion for ever victorious 'till felled by a
treacherous blow.

His hand that was mighty in battle was gentle
and gracious in peace ;

The captives he brought to his castle but grieved
when he gave them release :

He loved to have scholars, and sages, and music
and mirth at his board,

And nothing he had was too precious to give as
a poet's reward.

From him I had presents and prizes, from him I
had cattle and grounds,

Had chess-boards, and goblets, and brooches,
 had chariots and horses and hounds ;
But far beyond prizes and presents, more sweet
 to my heart, was the praise
That oft, before princes and peasants, he gave to
 my tales and my lays.

I'll follow his cruel betrayer and find her where-
 ever she be ;
I'll track out his cowardly slayer, the earth shall
 not hide him from me.
Contriving and striving for vengeance shall now
 be my only employ
'Till one or till both of the traitors shall die for
 the death of Curoi !”

On Rinkin-Beara's breezy height
 One pleasant summer day
Cuchullin and Blanaid the bright
With many a dame and noble knight
In happy mood, with spirits light,
 Were out for merry play.

Some roved and chatted, hand in hand,
And some, for very glee,
Or else to view a scene so grand,
Would ramble on and singly stand
Upon a rock-based ledge of land
That jutted o'er the sea.

With tale and song the hours went by
But time for more remained,
When, looking south, they could descry
An aged minstrel drawing nigh ;
There was a sadness in his eye,
His garb was travel-stained.

They gave him welcome and acclaim,
They saw his wants supplied ;
But when they sought to know his name,
And asked him why and whence he came,
And what he wished for—gold or fame—
He never once replied.

But when they bade him show his skill
Upon the harp he bore,

Then came such strains the heart to thrill,
The brain with joy or grief to fill,
As never once, in good or ill,
 'Twas theirs to hear before.

But most they seemed to touch Blanaid ;
 A something in the tone
Or in the airs he sang and played
Within her mind a trouble made—
On to the jutting ledge she strayed
 And stood there all alone.

The minstrel noted
 The way she sped ;
He followed after
 With cat-like tread.

She deemed he brought her
 Some bard's request—
He caught and held her
 Hard to his breast.

Then well she knew him,
And wild and high
Rang out and echoed
Her piercing cry !

With the speed of a deer came Cuchullin, loud-
shrieking with horror and pain !
He cried to her captor to spare her ; he prayed
and he threatened,—in vain.
The bard let the chieftain draw near him, then,
wild with a desperate joy,
He looked in his eyes and he shouted, “Cuchullin !
remember Curoi !”

He lifted Blanaid in that instant, went off from
the ledge with a leap,
And, holding her gripped as with iron, went
down like a stone in the deep.



A I L L E E N

AND

B A I L L E .

A I L L E E N

AND

BAILLE.

BAILLE.

THE blood of Kings was in the veins
Of Baillé, Buan's son,
But sweeter fame than kingship gains,
From all the land he won.

Rare gifts of beauty he could boast,
But few of all his race,
From Antrim's hills to Kerry's coast,
Could match his form and face.

Like brightest blooms of summer time,
His cheeks were smooth and fair,
And from a forehead white as lime
Rolled back his golden hair.

His skin was free from spot or speck ;
 No lady in the land
But well might sigh for such a neck
 And pine for such a hand.

Withal, in every manly charm
 Mac Buan stood complete,
Broad-chested, long and strong of arm,
 And light upon his feet.

And every one who knew in truth
 The things a man should be,
Would often say that such a youth
 It did one good to see.

It touched the heart like pleasant wine,
 It moved one like a song,
To see that shoot of Rury's line,
 So handsome and so strong.

But 'twas not for his eyes of light,
 Or for his winning smile,
Or yet his deeds of youthful might,
 His name went through the isle.

A rarer gift, a finer power
Than aught of blood or bone,
Young Baillé in some happy hour
Was granted for his own :

That wondrous cunning of the brain,
That subtle drift of speech,
Which bards would give their eyes to gain,
And ollamhs could not teach.

Strange ranns, and stories sweet and wild,
'Twas his to think and tell,
In flowing language, that beguiled
The listeners like a spell.

The hero's pulse more quickly beat,
Stirred by those potent words—
He felt the battle's sweltering heat,
He heard the clash of swords ;

Or saw the deer go speeding by
With quick and agile bounds,
And heard the deep melodious cry
Of swift pursuing hounds.

And when of lovers true he told,
 Their joy, or their distress,
Close, and more close, the young and old
 About his knees would press,

With April weather in their eyes
 As broke their hopes and fears
In sunny smiles and breezy sighs,
 And frequent rains of tears.

And when he spoke of magic arts,
 And shapes of good and ill,
The hearers felt their panting hearts
 With fear and pleasure thrill.

They felt as if inwrapped awhile
 In deep Druidic fogs,
They saw men turned by horrid guile
 To hawks, and wolves, and dogs—

Saw maidens fair as morning beams
 Condemned, by wicked spells,
To live as trout in rapid streams,
 And ugly eels in wells.

They heard fierce monsters howl and crash
Through glens and gloomy brakes,
And saw resplendent chariots flash
Through cities 'neath the lakes.

They saw old witches, black with spite,
Come sudden forth, and pass ;
Saw princes and princesses bright
In joyance tread the grass.

They saw the hill-folk at their sports,
And almost paused to hear
The *ceoal-shee*, from their dazzling courts,
Come stealing on the ear ;

As if the words he said and sung
Unclosed each fairy hall,
And Tir na-n-og had open flung
Its portals at his call.

In vain the bards, with envy fired,
Mused o'er the marvel long,
And toiled, till brain and heart were tired,
To match his tale and song.

And digged the Gaelic's richest mines ;
In vain : they never caught
The liquid music of his lines,
The sparkle of his thought.

The very stories he had told,
By others worded o'er,
Dragged slowly on, grew dull and cold,
And moved the heart no more.

They lost their glories one by one—
'Twas just the difference made
When gems that glisten in the sun
Are shifted to the shade.

And so through all the country rung
The young Mac Buan's fame,
And where it went, "the sweet of tongue"
Was added to his name.

No wonder many a lady bright
Was heart-sick for his sake,
Dreamed of him through the dreary night,
And wept for him awake.

No wonder many a maiden fair,
Who never dared to say
She loved him, paled in sweet despair,
And grieving pined away.

No wonder girls with hearts of pride,
And vain of flattered charms,
Put on their boldest airs, and tried
To storm him to their arms.

No wonder crafty beauties told
Sly tales for him to know,
What silks, what gems, what gifts of gold
Their fathers could bestow ;

What herds of kine, what steeds, what sheep,
What harvests rich and grand,
Were theirs, on many a level sweep,
And mountain slope of land.

But never in his heart they woke
A sympathetic tone,
And never once his glances spoke
An answer to their own.

The words, the deeds in friendship meant,
He welcomed as they came,
But love's advances only sent
A shiver through his frame.

Yet well, by many a token, clear
For women's eyes to see,
They knew his heart held some one dear,
But who and where was she?

With hints and jokes they probed his heart,
With shafts of woman's wit,
And watched his eye for flash or start
To tell them when they hit.

They watched the ways his servants sped :
At last from mouth to mouth,
Through all Armagh, the whisper spread,
Her home was to the South,

Amid the level meadows where
The silvery Liffey flows,
Though King and chiefs and people there
Were all his father's foes !

Soon more was known to thinkers keen,

And soon the word got wing,

He loved the young and fair Ailleen,

The grandchild of the King!

AILLEN.

'Twas even so, 'twas even so ;
They spied and guessed aright ;
But no one's wronger, no one's foe,
Was she, his heart's delight.

The song-birds singing in the woods
Knew more of hate and strife,
The spring-flowers opening from their buds
Lived not more pure a life.

'Twas even so ; her image lay
Within his heart enshrined,
The radiant vision, night and day,
Shone clear before his mind ;

And when in glowing words he told
Of beauty past compare,
Of tresses bright as burnished gold,
And shoulders snowy fair ;

Of lips like berries red and sweet,
And eyes whose bright'ning smile
Would strike the blood with sudden heat,
Or still the heart awhile ;

And how that shape of loveliness
Was belted, clasped, and crowned,
And how her broidered silken dress
Swept shining to the ground ;

And how her gems, and golden bars,
Flashed out in sudden lights,
And sparkled, like the twinkling stars
Of frosty winter nights,

The raptured listeners little knew
'Twas that dear love, Ailleen,
Shone in the dazzling sketch he drew,
And *not* the Fairy Queen.

Yes, fair Aileen, his words were bright,
Her beauty shining through,
As morning clouds are rich with light
Whose source is hid from view.

And that sweet life of blameless ways,
That spirit undefiled,
That mind unstained through stormy days
'Midst warriors fierce and wild,

All, all were his, because he dwelt
In thought with her alone,
And all her pure heart hoped and felt
Was imaged in his own.

THE MESSAGE.

AT length when many a month had past
In days that seemed as weeks,
Since Baillé saw her bright eyes last
And kissed her glowing cheeks,

His bended brows, his pensive face,
His voice that shook and broke,
His misty eyes, his changeful pace,
An inward trouble spoke.

And when his heart could bear no more,
He called the youth aside,
Who oft to fair Ailleen, before,
With words like these had hied;

And said, "Once more, O trusty lad,
Go South and see my sweet,
And whisper low, my heart is sad,
I die or else we meet.

"Say dark and dismal is my life
While thus we live apart ;
I yearn to see my promised wife
And clasp her, heart to heart.

"And say, our hands and hearts to join
The time and place shall be
The moon's full rounding, by the Boyne,
At woody Rosnaree."

THE JOURNEY.

WELL was the message sped, and when
The time was near at hand,
Mac Buan left his father's men,
And fled his father's land.

Down to Dundelgan's pleasant slopes
With eager steps he pressed,
His brain a whirl of glowing hopes,
Joy pulsing in his breast.

Eastward the sea came into view
'Twixt heights and headlands bold,
Great level tracts of sunny blue
With glints of green and gold.

Waveless it seemed, and yet the skiffs
 Rose up and sank from sight,
And frequent on the seaward cliffs
 A surf broke snowy white.

On land the cattle drowsed amid
 Their pastures green and soft,
The herdsmen sung in shadows hid,
 The larks sung far aloft.

And wood, and field, and pleasant glade
 All seemed that summer eve
A scene for peace and gladness made,
 Where not a heart should grieve.

THE APPARITION : TO BAILLE.

BUT who is this, of aspect ill,
That now comes on apace ?
His very presence seems to chill
And darken all the place.

A horrid man, in fretful mood,
Lean as a famished hound,
His visage shows a heart at feud
With all the world around.

His long hard lips seem made for nought
But slanders, scoffs, and lies,
And sure the home of cruel thought
Is in his small green eyes.

Afraid to pass in silence by,
Yet fearful to provoke
His bitter word, his harsh reply,
Mac Buan gently spoke—

“ Oh, good old man, and friendly-faced,
You’ve travelled far to-day ;
Whence come you in such eager haste,
And whither lies your way ?

“ And tell me, kindly, as you walked
Through Leinster’s sunny glades,
What news of good or ill was talked
Amongst her men and maids ? ”

With croaking voice, and eye of scorn,
Thus spoke the grim old man—
“ I left Slieve Laighen yestermorn,
I go to Inver Bann.

“ And little news is mine to tell,
Unless you choose to hear
The sudden sorrow that befel
A maiden young and fair.”

“ Oh,” said Mac Buan, “ let me know
The maiden’s cause of grief,
That I may think if yet her woe
Would yield to some relief.

“ For never young or old saw I
By sorrow stricken sore,
That mine was not the wish to try
And make them glad once more.

“ I never heard the choking sob
That told a heart’s deep pain,
But my heart, too, began to throb,
And trouble touched my brain.

“ And many a time when on my way
I met a tear-faced child,
Close by his side I chose to stay
And cheer him till he smiled.

“ But, oh, the sound of woman’s moan,
The sight of woman’s tears—
They thrilled, they chilled me to the bone,
They cut my heart like spears.

“ And day and night, awake, asleep,
Like guilt 'twould haunt me long,
If I could let a woman weep,
Nor strive to right her wrong.

“ Then say, old man, in mercy say
Where may this mourner be,
For how to chase her grief away
Mayhap is known to me.”

“ No grief or woe she feels, I trow,”
The spiteful wretch replied,
“ Her foolish heart is tranquil now,
And all her tears are dried.

“ Three days ago the crafty jade—
So young, and yet so bold—
At morn her slender form arrayed
In shining silks and gold ;

“ And flinging on a sombre cloak
To hide her splendours all,
Before the sleeping household woke
She fled her father's hall.

“ She stepped into her chariot light,
She touched her steeds so fleet,
And northward sped her daring flight,
Some lover true to meet ;

“ And as she went she sang a tune
With happy heart and free ;
'Twas of the rounding of the moon,
And woody Rosnaree.

“ But short the young one's journey when,
By noises on the wind,
She knew her father and his men
Were pressing close behind.

“ They gathered round her, and he took
His daughter from her place,
He gave but one reproachful look,
Then kissed her ashy face.

“ She died—within his arms she died,
No charms her life could save—
To-day I passed the crowd that cried
And howled around her grave.

“ Her name, her race, they’re easy told,
Young Ailleen, silly thing,
Was daughter of Prince Lewy bold,
And grandchild of the King.”

Mac Buan leaned against a tree,
He shook, he gasped for breath;
“ Go hence, go, hideous man,” said he,
“ Your words are worse than death.

“ Ailleen ! Ailleen ! my darling, dead !
And I die here apart !
Would I were in her narrow bed,
Beside her, heart to heart !

“ My brain is crushed, my eyes are blind,
My lips with blood run o’er :
Ah, well ; I deem the stroke is kind,
Since Ailleen lives no more.”

He swayed a moment to and fro,
Then sank upon the green ;
Awhile amid the grass blades low
He whispered of Ailleen.

Then all was still : the smooth young brow
 No longer paled and flushed,
The agile limbs were pulseless now,
 The tuneful voice was hushed.

To men and maids the winning tongue
 Its last sweet tale had told,
The generous hand that day had flung
 Its last bright gift of gold.

THE APPARITION: TO AILLEEN.

THE old man eyed the beauteous form,
In splendid garb arrayed,
Stretched like a flower some howling storm
Low on the earth had laid.

Then turned, and laughed, and rubbed his hands,
And quick retraced his way,
And, till he reached Prince Lewy's lands
He stopped not, night or day.

Still on he pressed : the palace smoke
Rose up before his eyes
In huge blue clouds that thinned, and broke,
And drowsed about the skies.

He passed by bawns and cattle keeps,
By busy mills and stores,
With grain within in plenteous heaps,
And white about the doors.

He saw strong oxen, moving slow,
Drag in from woods and byres
Fresh cloven logs to keep aglow
The roaring palace fires.

He saw the royal steeds led out
To where the stream was wide,
A shining, snorting, wayward rout,
Thin-limbed and eager-eyed.

He heard the deer-hounds snarl and fret
Inside their kennel wall,
And oft, despite of thong and threat,
Fall howling one and all.

And coming to the hurdle gate
That marked the palace grounds,
He saw the pillar-stone that straight
Was set beside the bounds ;

The lettered stone that said, " Attend ;
Let every comer know,
This gives him welcome, if a friend ;
Defiance, if a foe."

He heeded not, but glided in
Quick as a sudden gloom,
And stayed not till he stood within
Young Aillean's sunny room.

Awhile he watched her dress and deck
Her heart-entrancing charms,
She slipped her necklace on her neck,
Her armlets on her arms ;

She placed above her forehead fair
The arch of burnished gold,
Her royal minn, that rivalled there
A moon of six days old.

She took her cloak of silver braid,
She took her brooches bright,
And turning where her torc was laid,
She saw the horrid sight.

She raised her hands, she stood aghast,

Her cheeks grew white with fear :

“ Who is the man,” she said at last,

“ That dares to enter here ?

“ Whence does he come ; why does he chose

To cause me this surprise ?

Quick, let him speak the evil news,

That lights his bitter eyes.”

“ On to Slieve Laighen lies my way,”

Replied the grim old man—

“ I passed Dundelgan yesterday ;

I come from Inver Bann.

“ And all the news I’ve got to tell

Is brief, but bitter truth ;

The sudden woe that late befel

A brave and comely youth.”

“ Oh, tell me, tell me, where and when,”

Exclaimed the gentle maid ;

“ My father and my father’s men

Will hasten to his aid.”

“ In vain,” the wretch replied, “ for now
No trouble hurts the boy ;
His foolish heart has done, I trow,
With sorrow and with joy.

“ Three days and nights have only sped
Since, filled with fancies sweet,
From out his princely home he fled,
Some lover true to meet.

“ And, as he went, a merry tune
With happy heart sang he ;
’Twas of the rounding of the moon,
And woody Rosnaree.

“ Then came his father on his track,
His clansmen closed around ;
He cast one glance of terror back,
Then sank upon the ground.

“ There, where he fell, they dug his grave,
Close by Dundelgan’s strand,
Where evermore the restless wave
Is moaning on the land.

“I’ve passed the tomb they raised, and still
His funeral fair was kept—
Men played their games of strength and skill,
And loud the women wept.

“What more? Of Rury’s race he came,
From Capha’s tribe-root sprung,
From Buan’s blood; his common name
Was Baillé, sweet of tongue.”

She shrieked as if a keen-edged dart
Was plunged into her side;
She pressed her hands upon her heart,
And faint for help she cried.

He heard her groan, he saw her fall,
He left with stealthy tread—
In rushed her handmaids, screaming all,
And found young Ailleen dead.

THE TREES.

So died, by cruel falsehood slain,
Those lovers fond and true,
For ah, when love fills heart and brain,
Such wrong a word can do.

But days sped past, and years went by,
When lo ! from Baillé's grave
A yew tree sprouted fair and high,
By bright Dundelgan's wave.

And lo ! from Ailleen's narrow bed,
By Liffey's sparkling tide,
An apple tree rose up, and shed
Its fragrance far and wide.

And many a time, when hand in hand
True lovers whispering strolled
Along Dundelgan's yellow sand,
This doleful tale was told.

And oft beneath Mac Buan's yew
 They talked and whispered long,
And said how like himself it grew,
 So tall, and straight, and strong.

And many a time when rushing by
 The gusty night-wind came,
They heard the branches sob and sigh,
 And whisper Aillean's name.

Oft, too, where Liffey rippling flows
 By castle, field, and fort,
Was told this tale of many woes,
 In hut, and hall, and court.

And many a time would lovers stay
 Their slowly pacing feet
Near Aillean's apple tree, and say
 'Twas like her, bright and sweet.

And oft while dropped the blossom leaves,
 They strained their eager ears,
"Hush, hear," they said, "how Aillean grieves,
 And see her falling tears."

THE POETS.

So seven long years passed slowly o'er,
When, from Armagh's fair town,
A poet sought Dundelgan's shore,
And cut the yew tree down.

The day, the hour were just the same,
When from the winding Lee
To Liffey's side a poet came,
And felled the apple tree.

And from the wood so white and fair,
Each deftly fashioned out
A poet's tablet, straight and square,
And light to bear about.

Then home returned, and roving o'er
Their native hills and vales,
Went adding to their precious store
Of legends, songs, and tales.

And soon on Baillé's yew tree, one
Had graven with his hand,
The saddest, sweetest love deeds done
In Ulster's noble land.

And one on Aillean's apple tree
Had notched and dinted plain,
The loves, the plights, the bridal glee
Of Munster's wide domain.

SAMHAIN.

So wrought the bards while years rolled on,
Till came that Samhain round
When noble Art, the son of Conn,
Was King of Ireland's ground.

And forth was sped his royal call
To summon to the feast
The kingdom's high professors all,
Bard, Brehon, Prophet, Priest.

From north and south, from east and west,
From all the land they came,
And brought the works they loved the best,
To hold or win their fame.

And while beneath the palace roof

 Their merits true were tried,

Another crowd, not far aloof,

 Held show and game outside.

There athletes played such dexterous feats

 That aged men, and wise,

Said magic made the quick deceits

 That passed before their eyes.

There goldsmiths showed their carven gold

 For noble breasts and brows,

Bright bits on which a palm might fold,

 Yet worth a thousand cows.

Tough armour suits were offered there,

 And weapons keen and bright,

And chariots firmly made, to bear

 The champions through the fight.

THE CONTEST.

At length before the monarch Art,
The sacred rites were done,
'The laws were tested part by part,
The harper's prize was won.

And now came on the poets' time
To chant their lays aloud,
And have their rush of thought and rhyme
Judged by the critic crowd.

One after one arose and stood,
His tablet in his hand,
And read from off the graven wood
His story, sweet or grand.

Some told of wars where hosts engaged,
Of sieges lasting long,
Of single combats, fairly waged
By champions brave and strong.

Some told of voyages and toils
Upon the stormy seas ;
Of forays, creaghts, and cattle-spoils,
And fierce revenge for these.

And some of loves and courtships told,
Their sweet and bitter fruit ;
Of bridals gay, elopements bold,
And many a hot pursuit.

And now of all the company
There sate unheard but two ;
’Twas he who felled the apple tree,
And he who felled the yew.

The poet from the Ulster town
First held his tablet forth,
And read as he had marked them down,
The love tales of the North.

And many a heart beat fast the while,
And sometimes tears were shed,
And faces wore a happy smile,
And words of cheer were said.

And then the Munster bard arose,
Last of the poet band,
And read the trials, joys, and woes,
The love-lore of his land.

'Twas strange what charm the words possessed,
No heart their power withstood,
The vainest, bitterest bards confessed,
The lays were passing good.

And many a one rubbed down his beard,
And owned, if sweeter rhyme
On Erin's soil was ever heard,
'Twas long before his time.

And on from one to one about,
A whisper swelled and passed,
That said the prize, beyond a doubt,
Would lie between these last.

THE TABLETS.

THEN from his seat uprose the King,
And said, of all the host,
These two, the last to read and sing,
Had touched his heart the most.

He listened long, he listened well,
And now, he owned, 'twas hard
To know the sweetest song, or tell
Which was the better bard.

But bring the tablets here, and he
Will read them with his eyes,
He'll hold them in his hands, and see
Where most of merit lies.

They brought the tablets fair and white,
He held them near to view ;
The apple tree was in his right,
His left hand held the yew.

When lo ! a clash ! the staves have sprung
From out the hands of Art ;
The woods have met, and close have clung
Like lovers, heart to heart !

The King stood up in wild amaze,
Bards, Brehons, Artists, all,
Upon the wondrous sight to gaze,
Came rushing through the hall.

One after one the strongest tried
To pull the staves in twain,
Then twos and threes their strength applied
To part them ; but in vain.

Their owners whispered, each to each,
With heads a moment bowed,
Then to the King one spoke a speech
Before the listening crowd,

And said, "The truth stands clear to us,
O glorious monarch Art ;
We know why cling the tablets thus,
Like lovers heart to heart.

"'Twas we who shaped them, straight and square,
From trees that grew above
The graves that held a hapless pair
Who died of baffled love.

"Their fond hearts fed the roots ; their blood
Has passed into the sap ;
Their flesh has formed the sentient wood
That started in your lap.

"Their names, their fame, are known for years
Through Ireland far and wide ;
And oft is told, 'midst sobs and tears,
The mournful death they died.

"So came those wondrous staves you see,
And this is how they grew,
From Ailleen's grave the apple tree,
From Baillé's grave the yew."

Through all the house a murmur ran
Of pity and delight ;

But one spoke out, an aged man,
Whose locks were snowy white,

And said, " O monarch ! Tara's hall
Holds many a treasure rare,
Make place among the best of all,
And set this wonder there ;

" That all within this noble isle
May know and understand
That love so true, so free from guile,
Is honoured in the land.

" For as the judge should aye be just,
The priest be pure and grave,
The servant faithful to his trust,
The soldier ever brave,

" So should the lover constant be ;
The fickle, weak, untrue,
When tried, will prove their perfidy
To King and country too." •

The crowd broke up, the monarch bore
The tablets, firmly clung,
And set them where his choicest store
Of gifts and trophies hung.

And there the wondrous two in one
For many a year remained,
Till Cormac, Art's beloved son,
In Tara ruled and reigned.

Then furious Dunlaing raging came,
Spread war and havoc round,
Burst on the hall with sword and flame,
And burned it to the ground.

CONCLUSION.

BUT for that deed, though since has passed
Full many an age away,
Those tablets, clinging close and fast,
We might have here to-day.

Within those rooms where fondly cared,
Shrined, shelved, in order due,
The relics war and time have spared
Are now set forth to view,

With coins, and spears, and armour rings,
Old trinkets finely wrought,
Old harps that cheered the hearts of kings,
Old swords with which they fought ;

With cauldrons, querns, and ogham stones,
With axes, skeans, and hooks,
Bells, crosses, croziers, urns, and bones,
And well-belovéd books.

And oft would Irish sages pore
On notch, and scratch, and dint ;
Debate the meaning hotly o'er,
And give their views to print.

And Irish girls, fair, fond, and good,
Would view the marvel oft,
And tremble as they tapped the wood
With fingers small and soft.

And youths, perchance, with thoughtful airs,
Would gaze, and wonder how
The world would go if love like theirs
Became the fashion now.

Ah, sad it is our isle should be
Of that dear block bereft,
That of that yew or apple tree
Not even a chip is left.

Yet lives the story fresh and green,
And long shall old and young
Relate the loves of fair Ailleen
And Baillé, "sweet of tongue."



THE
LAY OF OSSIAN
ON THE
LAND OF YOUTH.

THE
LAY OF OSSIAN
ON THE
LAND OF YOUTH;
AS HE RELATED IT TO ST. PATRICK.

THE Fians are gone and passed away ;
Of all their band so brave and gay,
I, weak and wrinkled, old and gray,
Alone am left, in cheerless woe ;
Oh, would that midst the battle's pride,
Close by my noble Oscar's side,
On Gabhra's field of death I died,
The day that saw their overthrow !

What joy and sorrow since befel,
O cleric of the psalm and bell,
It rends my heart to think or tell—
Yet you shall hear the tale from me ;

And when 'tis told, you'll freely own,
That well may Ossian sigh and groan,
For happy times for ever flown,
And friends he never more shall see !

One morning we, the sorrowing few,
Who lived that day of conflict through,
Went forth, as still we loved to do,
With our good dogs to hunt the deer ;
'Twas by the shores of bright Loch Lene,
'Midst towering hills, and valleys green,
And fragrant woods, where birds unseen
Make mellow music all the year.

We roused the deer ; away she sprang—
Our eager hounds stretched out and sang ;
From hill and crag the echoes rang
As on we pressed with joyful speed ;
When lo ! as if a star were cast
To earth, we saw approaching fast
Through trees that brightened as she passed,
A maiden on a milk-white steed.

The Fianna ceased to urge the chase—
They stood as rooted to the place,
To gaze upon that form and face,
 One glimpse of which was more than bliss ;
For well our heroes knew that while
They roved and fought through all the isle,
And basked in many a beauty's smile,
 They never saw a sight like this.

A royal crown, of beauty rare,
O'ertopped her brow and temples fair,
The ringlets of her shining hair
 Far o'er her graceful shoulders rolled ;
A silken mantle, lightly bound
And clasped her slender waist around,
Swept o'er her feet and touched the ground,
 And sparkled bright with stars of gold.

Her winsome eyes, of cloudless blue,
Shone pure and clear as drops of dew
That glisten, while the morn is new,
 Upon the grass blades' dainty tips ;

With rosy bloom her cheeks were bright,
As driven snow her neck was white,
And shone her teeth like lines of light,
 Inside her rounded ruby lips.

Full beauteous was her milk-white steed,
Sweet-shaped and bright, of choicest breed;
High-arched his glossy neck, and speed
 Was in each slender shining limb;
His saddle-cloth, long, smooth, and wide,
Was starred with gold on either side,
A golden bit he champed in pride,
 And shoes of gold were under him.

She spoke!—no birds more sweetly sing,
No silver bells more clearly ring,
Than rang her words—“O Fenian King,
 Brave Fionn, I’ve come a distant way;”
“O charming princess, who art thou?
Bright queen, whence hast thou come, and how?
Relate to us thy story now,”
 My noble sire found heart to say.

She answered thus, "O, Fionn the brave,
My name is Golden-headed Niav;
My father, far o'er hill and wave,
Rules blissfully the Land of Youth."

"O bright faced princess, tell to me,"
Said Fionn, "Why hast thou crossed the sea—
Has one well loved forsaken thee,
And dost thou mourn his base untruth?"

"King of the Fianns," she sweetly said,
"Though many a vow to me is made,
No love of mine has been betrayed,
No hope of mine has been undone;
For even rumour never gave
To wise, or great, or young, or brave,
The heart of Golden-headed Niav,
Till now I give it to your son."

"Say, princess bright, how can this be,
Which of my valiant sons is he,
How has he won thy love from thee,
Why yield to him so dear a prize?"

While all the nobles high and grand,
The kings, the chiefs of every land,
Were thine to choose from, to command,
 With one sweet smile from those blue eyes."

She smiled and said, "Your Ossian's name,
To even our distant country came;
Before the splendour of his fame,
 The pride of kings looked poor and dim;
My heart grew full of strange delight—
I thought of Ossian brave and bright,
From rosy morn till starry night,
 And lo! I've come to seek for him."

O Patrick, think, if think you can,
How through my veins her sweet words ran;
I trembled like a wounded man,
 My head grew light, as if with wine;
I stepped into the open space—
I saw my welcome in her face—
And there before the Fenian race,
 I took her small white hand in mine.

I said, "Oh, princess, fair and young,
Sweet is the music of your tongue;
No bard or minstrel ever sung,
 A lay so full of joy to me!
I quit the chase, I quit the strife,
I give to you my love, my life,
I take you for my darling wife,
 Through all the years that are to be."

Her red lips moved again to say,
"O generous Ossian, now I lay
On you my bonds, that straight away,
 You speed with me from where we stand;
My steed is fleet, my steed is strong,
His flight is like a wild bird's song,
And fast he'll bear us both along,
 To Tir-nan-oge, the happy land.

"All pleasures, all delights are found
Within its bright enchanted ground;
The flowers shine out the whole year round,
 With juicy fruit the boughs are bent;

The woods, the fields, for ever fair,
With perfume fill the golden air,
And never a sight or sound is there,
 To mar the perfect heart's-content.

“Time glides away, but nothing shows,
And no one thinks of how it goes ;
Decay or death comes not to those
 O'er whom are bent its charming skies ;
Their beauty blooms a deathless flower,
Their blood retains its youthful power,
Their hearts are glad, as in the hour,
 When first those wonders met their eyes.

“Silver and gold shall there be thine,
Jewels that star-like flash and shine,
Delightful feasts, and games, and wine,
 And, from sweet harps, melodious sounds ;
A hundred swords shall be thy right,
A hundred cloaks of satin bright,
A hundred steeds, quick-paced in fight,
 A hundred keen and active hounds.

“A hundred virgins, young and gay,
Resplendent as the dawning day,
Shall there attend thy pleasant way,
 A tuneful and a smiling throng ;
A hundred heroes there shall be
Companions true and meet for thee,
With sports and feats of chivalry,
 To pass the happy hours along.

“A diadem bright, that never yet
On brow of mortal man was set,
From my brave father thou shalt get—
 From every ill ’twill guard thy life ;
Unnumbered joys no words could bring,
Within thy mind’s imagining,
Their gladness on thy heart shall fling,
 And I shall be thy loving wife.”

I said, while rapture shook my voice,
“Bright queen, thou’st made my heart rejoice ;
Thou art, thou would’st be still my choice,
 If all the world were here to see ;

Lead where thou wilt ; I'd follow though
My lot were death, or endless woe,
And gladly now from hence I'll go,
To blissful Tir-nan-oge with thee."

Light as a bird I took my place
Behind that form of matchless grace ;
Thrice neighed the steed ; he moved a pace,
And turned toward the shining strand ;
And then—oh, woe ! 'twas sad to hear,
The wail that echoed far and near,
The cry of anguish, loud and clear,
From Fionn and all the Fenian band.

I heard my father, weeping, say,
" My Ossian, wilt thou go away ?
To me this is a doleful day,
For ne'er shall I behold thee more !"
I stooped, and kissed him while he cried,
My tears and his made one hot tide,
And even though Niav was by my side,
My heart within felt sad and sore.

For many a day of joy had we
Amidst the Fenian company,
Many a night of mirth and glee

Above our chess-boards and our wine ;
Delightful hunts through vale and dell,
Rough conflicts too—we loved them well—
Where many a mighty foeman fell—

Such noble sports were Fionn's and mine.

I bade my friends a sad adieu ;
Our steed approached the ocean blue,
It ebbd before us ; on we flew—

It closed behind us as we went ;
Right on we sped for many a mile,
On either side we saw, the while,
The slopes of many a fruitful isle,
With towers and towns magnificent.

Sweet princess of the shining hair,
I said, those isles are wondrous fair ;
Fond hearts could live for ever there,
Content, and joyful too, in sooth.

She said, and shook her curls of gold,
“ My gentle Ossian, dark and cold,
Thou’lt deem them once thine eyes behold
The glories of the Land of Youth.”

Right on we rode, and lo ! the skies
Put on a dark and gloomy guise ;
Wild gusts of wind began to rise,
And soon the roaring tempest came—
We heard the green woods groan and crash,
We heard the angry waters dash,
And in the lightning’s lurid flash,
The mountain waves seemed all aflame.

Still on we rode ; ere long we knew
With lessening force the tempest blew ;
The black clouds broke, the stars peeped through,
The air felt fresh, and warm, and sweet ;
A moment more, and out of sight
Passed every sign and shade of night,
Above our heads the sun shone bright,
And fields were green beneath our feet.

Oh, what a scene I then surveyed !
What charms of hill, and glen, and glade !
What golden lights, what grateful shade,
 Beneath the blossom-laden trees !
Fresh flowers each moment seemed to blow
Bright birds went flitting to and fro,
And sounds of music, sweet and low,
 Came wafted on the balmy breeze.

A royal fortress, nobly planned,
Stood on an emerald crest of land ;
A palace, towering tall and grand,
 Was close beside ; and near to those
Were summer-houses, bright and small,
Whose every spire, and roof, and wall,
Was built of gems that flashed with all
 The hues a glistening rainbow shows.

“ Oh, princess of the locks of gold,
Is this fair scene we now behold
The happy land of which you’ve told,
 Where love and joy shall ever be ? ”

Such words I spoke ; then sweet and clear
Her answer came—" My Ossian, dear,
This is the happy land, and here
Thou shalt have all I promised thee."

Then all in gold and silken sheen,
A hundred maids, of graceful mein,
Came pacing lightly o'er the green
To give us gracious welcoming.
Next marched along the verdant way
A warrior host in proud array,
Their dress and weapons glittering gay,
And in their midst, the King, the King !

A monarch fit to rule was he,
A glorious flower of chivalry,
His shining robes were grand to see
And dazzling was the crown he wore ;
His beauteous Queen, in regal state,
Next brightened through the palace gate,
And fifty maidens, all elate,
Came on the path she travelled o'er.

They hastened on to where we stood ;
Then spoke the King in gracious mood,
And said, “ My people fond and good
 Give welcome to the hero brave—
To Ossian, Fionn’s most noble son,
Who many a valiant deed has done,
Whose beauty, strength, and grace have won
 The heart of Golden-headed Niav.”

He stepped before that glittering band—
He said, “ Brave youth from Erin’s land,
We give you now, with heart and hand,
 A hundred thousand welcomes here,
Where care or grief cannot annoy,
Where pleasure is the sole employ,
Where life is all a cloudless joy
 And hateful death can never appear.

“ This, Ossian, is my gentle Queen,
And this my daughter ; thou hast seen,
Though many a league lay dark between
 Our land and thine, she would depart

And cross wide seas and mountains blue,
To seek for thee all Erin through ;
We blamed her not, for well we knew
Thou wert the chosen of her heart."

I thanked the King in gracious speech,
The Queen and Niav, I bowed to each,
And all moved gaily on to reach

The palace on the flowery mound ;
Then came the feasting and the glee,
The shouts, the songs, the minstrelsy,
The mirth that lasted light and free
While full ten days and nights went round.

Before that time of joy was sped
The gentle Niav and I were wed.
Oh, happy was the life we led

Within that land of love and song !
There came no thought of pain or ill,
There came no cloud our hearts to chill,
The world grew bright and brighter still
As years uncounted rolled along.

Two blooming sons, our joy and pride,
Grew up to manhood by my side,
And one sweet daughter, azure eyed,
Bright cheeked, and white necked as the swan ;
The names of Fionn and Oscar brave
Unto my gallant boys I gave,
And by consent of gold-haired Niav
I called my daughter Plur-na-mban.

Yet when some blissful years went o'er
I yearned to see my native shore,
To meet my father Fionn, once more,
And greet the gallant Fenian host—
To learn what noble deeds were done,
What foes were fought, what trophies won,
What glorious hunts were gaily run,
Since I went forth from Erin's coast.

I whispered to my loving wife
The secret wish that crossed my life—
She thrilled as though a wounding knife
Were bared my blood or hers to take ;

She paled with thoughts of woes and harms,
She flushed and swayed with sad alarms,
She hid her head between my arms,
And sobbed as if her heart would break.

“ My darling Niav,” I murmured low,
“ Fear not if hence awhile I go ;
The milk-white steed the way will know
To bear me safe to Erin’s isle ;
Oh, trust me, brief my stay shall be,
For all my heart will rest with thee,
And life can have no charm for me
Afar from thy enchanting smile.”

She, weeping, said, “ My Ossian dear,
I will not seek to hold thee here,
Though, oh, my heart is sore with fear,
That this may be our last embrace.
Thou little know’st how changed a state
May soon be thine, how dark a fate,
What wild regrets, but all too late,
If once thou leavest this happy place.

“Remember, Ossian, what I say,
If thou, from Tir-nan-oge away,
Thy foot on earth should chance to lay,
 There, sad and lone, wilt thou remain ;
I say it twice—dear love, take heed,
For what I tell is truth indeed—
Once step from off the milk-white steed,
 Thou’lt never tread this land again.

“I say it thrice—my Ossian, sweet,
Whatever chance is thine to meet,
Upon the earth set not thy feet,
 Howe’er thy heart may feel inclined ;
For if thou dost, oh, dreadful doom !
That moment fade thy youth and bloom,
The weight of age thou wilt assume,
 And sink enfeebled, bent, and blind.

“But why return to Erin green?
’Tis not the land that it has been ;
Brave Fionn can never more be seen,
 Nor one of all his champions strong :

Evanished are the Fenian race—
Calm, saintly men are in their place,
Who scorn the combat and the chase,
And fast and pray the whole day long.

“ Oh, Ossian ! darling as thou art,
'Tis sad, 'tis hard from thee to part ;
The thought is heavy at my heart
That ills await you where you go.
I little dreamed such grief as this
Would close our years of perfect bliss—
Take, Ossian dear, my parting kiss,
Then turn and leave me to my woe.”

'Twas sad, O Patrick, to behold
The tears that down her features rolled,
To see her shake her locks of gold
And lowly bow her lovely head—
I kissed her lips and burning brow,
I said—Sweet love, why weeping now,
When, thus forewarned, I fondly vow
To guard my life as thou hast said ?

I bade to all a fond adieu—
Wife, children, friends, and comrades true ;
I leaped upon the steed—he knew
 His ancient way by wave and wood ;
He brought me safe to Erin's ground—
Each well-known scene I sought and found,
But ah, so changed ! I gazed around
 And oft I doubted where I stood.

Ere long I saw—a new surprise—
A troop of men of puny size ;
They gazed at me with wondering eyes
 So vast they deemed my bulk to be ;
I stopped and asked if they could say
Was mighty Fionn alive to-day,
Or what had swept his host away,
 If none were left to welcome me.

They quickly said, “ We know full well
That many a tale our bards can tell
Of valiant Fionn, whom none could quell,
 And Fians who lived in times of old ;

By many a sweet melodious sage
On many a well beloved page
In volumes blurred and brown with age,
Those wondrous tales are grandly told.

“And this we heard, that Fionn could boast
One son the pride of all his host—
In all the land, from coast to coast,
Unmatched among its noblest men ;
A maiden bright for him came o’er,
From Tir-nan-oge to Erin’s shore ;
He went, and he returned no more :
But many an age has passed since then.”

I started as the words were said,
Big bitter tears in streams I shed—
What ! Fionn and all the Fianna dead !
Ah, could that mournful tale be true ?
With doeful heart, all cold and chill,
I turned and rode for Aluin’s hill
To see if one might linger still,
Where many an hour of joy we knew.

I found that place of games and sport,
The Fenian's best beloved resort—
Alas, I scarce could trace the court—

 'Twas thick with weeds and nettles tall.
Away I rode from scene to scene,
Where once their haunts and homes had been,
And oh ! my woe was deep and keen,
 When I had vainly searched them all.

One day of gloom and sorrow when
I rode along the Thrushes' Glen,
I saw a crowd of feeble men
 By some tremendous task oppressed ;
A flag of marble, thick and wide,
To lift from off their backs they tried,
In vain they shouted, called, and cried,
 And strained what strength they all possessed.

Some calmly wept their hopeless plight,
Some sank and fell before my sight,
Some raved, and soon went mad outright,
 Such terror in their hearts had birth ;

Their master turned and spoke to me,
“Give help, O mighty prince,” said he,
“Or soon this hapless host will be
Crushed down, a bleeding mass, to earth.”

It is a shame, I answered loud,
’Tis sad to see so vast a crowd
Beneath so light a burden bowed—
The sight to me is strange and new ;
Were my brave Oscar here to-day
His hand beneath that flag he’d lay,
And hurl it o’er your heads away,
For well he loved such feats to do.

But I myself will do the deed,
I said, and stooped across my steed—
I grasped the flag, and o’er the mead
I cast it with a giant’s force ;
Oh, woeful feat ! oh, deed of pain !
So great the weight, the push, the strain,
My saddle fastening snapt in twain,
And down I fell from off my horse.

Loud neighed the steed—away he swept—
Through all my frame a coldness crept ;
Ah, then with grief and fear I wept,
 For soon the promised change began ;
My dark brown hair grew silver white,
Into my eyes came hideous night,
And void of vigour, grace, and might,
 I shrivelled up, a weak old man.

There, Patrick, you have heard the tale,
You know the woes that I bewail ;
What heart of living man could fail
 To think on them with kindly ruth,
Or wonder if I thus deplore
The Fianna of the times of yore,
And weep that I shall see no more
 My darlings in the Land of Youth ?

The Fians are gone and passed away,
Of all their band so brave and gay
I, weak and wrinkled, old and gray,
 Alone am left in cheerless woe.

Oh, would that midst the battle's pride
Close by my noble Oscar's side,
On Gabhra's field of death I died,
The day that saw their overthrow !



THE VOYAGE
OF
THE O'CORRAS.

THE VOYAGE OF THE O'CORRAS.

AN IRISH LEGEND OF THE SIXTH CENTURY.

We were brothers wild and free,
Rough and strong and fierce of will;
Alike in shape and mind were we,
We loved but war and cruelty,
And found our joy in doing ill.

Three brothers ; wicked from our birth,
And from our earliest pulse of life ;
We brought no blessed peace or mirth
Unto our sinful parents' hearth,
But only terror, gloom, and strife.

Yet famed through Connaught, far and near,
Were Connall Dearg O'Corra's halls
For laugh, and song, and plenteous cheer—
Whoever passed a-nigh could hear
Three ceaseless shouts within the walls.

The shout of men who baked and brewed
The pleasant cheer midst crackling flames,
The shout of giving ales and food
Amongst the merry multitude,
The shout of heroes at their games.

Yet, hapless couple ! grief was theirs,
For childless long their lives ran on,
And so from hearts grown dark with cares,
To Heaven went up their piteous pray'rs,
Beseeching only for a son.

But tears and prayers seemed all in vain ;
They drifted into sad old age,
Till midst his glooms of grief and pain
Wild thoughts disturbed the old man's brain,
And stirred him with unholy rage.

He spoke unto the woman's ear—

Day after day he spoke it o'er—

“God pities not, or will not hear,

No help of His our lives will cheer ;

We'll pray to heedless Heaven no more.”

And further still, as time rolled past,

From grace the wretched couple fell,

Until with rite of prayer and fast

They bowed their whitening heads at last,

And madly asked a son from Hell.

Before a year from thence went by,

One night of thund'rous storm and flame,

Midst many a howl, and laugh, and cry

From evil spirits watching nigh,

Three sons into the world we came.

I, Lochan, in the eerie light

Of darkening eve, was eldest born .

Next Einné at the mid of night ;

And then, midst wonder and affright,

Came Sylvester at early morn.

They would have wished their words unsaid

The hour they saw our faces first ;

They looked into our eyes with dread,

They wished us lying with the dead,

They would have prayed it if they durst.

But well we throve and fast we grew ;

Yet ere our feet the soil could press,

Our neighbours, and their neighbours too,

And half of Iar Connaught knew

Our hearts were full of wickedness.

For aye the sound of prayer or hymn

Would make us tremble, scream, and toss,

And anger worked in every limb,

And our young cheeks grew black and grim

Whene'er they signed us with the cross.

And as to manhood's strength we rose,

Who served the Lord, we viewed with hate :

We felt we were their fated foes,

And bound to work them many woes,

And make their places desolate.

Ere long from all our western land—

On from the Shannon to the sea,
We sought and brought a desperate band,
Who joyed to hear the deeds we plann'd,
And swore our followers true to be.

Pirates, who from the storm-swept isles,
Launched their light skiffs to rob and slay ;
Sly travelling thieves well versed in wiles,
And murderers from the lone defiles,
That gloom through many a mountain way.

Wretches of whom we need not fear
That they would scorn to wrong the weak,
Or stay their hands for prayer or tear,
Or feel one qualm when they should hear
The old men groan, the women shriek.

Prepared at last, with dire intent
Forth from our meeting place we burst,
And, spreading terror as we went,
To Tuam's church our way we bent,
To wreck that sacred pile the first.

We slew the priests who could not flee,
We gathered altar, bench, and door,
Mitres and vestments fair to see,
We heaped them high, and hurriedly
We burned them on the blood-stained floor.

Then for Kinvara shaped our way,
For mild St. Coman's house of pray'r ;
'Twas well he fled at close of day—
That night the waves of Galway Bay
Were brightened with its lurid glare.

And burning, wasting, slaying still,
And glorying in our deeds of shame,
We came to Clothar, with a will
The good old Erenach to kill
And give the church to sword and flame.

We saw him on the abbey ground
That summer evening, calm and fair ;
He sate upon a grassy mound
And generous cheer he dealt around
To pious travellers gathered there.

He knew us surely, and perchance

The purpose at our hearts he guessed,
So piercing was his quiet glance,
But yet he checked not our advance,
But fed us kindly like the rest.

I whispered to my brothers—"Ho !

Not now's the time to light the spark ;
To slumber we must seem to go ;
At midnight, when the moon is low,
I'll rise and tap you in the dark."

O, youth that listens to my tale,

O gracious bishop, mark it well,
You'll walk again among the Gael,
You'll tread the fields of Innisfail,
And these my words I charge you tell.

I did not mean to sleep that night—

I strove to watch, but strove in vain ;
A drowsy sense of strange delight,
Some wondrous charm of sound and sight,
Stole softly to my troubled brain.

Sweet music drifted to my ears,
As if from happy places blown :
It brought me first the bliss of tears,
It waked a life of hopes and fears
My heart till then had never known.

It bore me up, away, away
Beyond the gold and purple stars,
Till dazzling in the distance lay
The region of eternal day,
Whose light no gloom or shadow mars.

O happy land ! O glorious place !
O home of spirits ever blest ;
What love was in each angel face ;
What peace, what plentitude of grace !
What joy those radiant eyes express'd !

Mild saints were there whose lives had sped
Along the ways their Master trod—
Hermits who far from pleasure fled,
And martyrs who had freely bled,
And gladly died for Christ their God.

But now they wore the crowns they won
In turmoil fierce, or calm retreat ;
Their robes were like a raiment spun
From out the texture of the sun,
And there were stars beneath their feet.

And there were legions manifold
Of pure, unearthly, holy things,
Who, while the loud Hosannas rolled,
Swept joyfully their harps of gold,
And shook their rainbow-tinted wings.

But distant far in lustrous haze
The central glory flamed and shone,
One instant only could I gaze
Upon the flood of burning rays
That flashed round God's eternal throne.

Oh, pale is sunset's crimson glow,
And dull the morning's golden sheen ;
There is no light on earth below,
No hint from which the soul may know
The glory of that heavenly scene.

I strove to reach those shining plains,
I yearned to share that nameless bliss ;
But ah, I felt the heavy chains,
And I was foul with all the stains
Of deeds that I had done amiss.

And then the music-gusts that bore
My spirit to that holy height,
Pealed sadder, fainter, than before,
And down, far down, I sank once more
Through deepening glooms of death and night.

Down, down—and soon the mournful tones
With fierce, accusing strains were blent.
Down, down—fear-stricken to the bones,
Through storms of curses, shrieks, and groans,
For regions of the damned I went.

A horrid land I saw, appalled—
Across it swept four sluggish streams,
A stream to freeze, a stream to scald,
A stream where hideous serpents crawled,
And one that flashed with lurid gleams.

One frightful worm, with countless feet
And many heads, came straggling nigh—
The mortal heart would cease to beat
That saw that sight through smoke and heat—
But fast the hell-storm whirled me by.

The fire ! the fire ! I saw it glow !
I heard it crackle, hiss, and roar !
I saw the tortured souls below
In seas of flame surge to and fro,
And boil around a burning shore !

I felt the hot blast on my face,
I heard one wild appalling yell,
And rushing from the pit's red base,
A demon, pointing to my place,
Flung back the screaming gates of Hell.

A haggard, altered man I woke
From what I knew was not a dream ;
A touch, a step, my slumbers broke,
And by my side my brothers spoke,
While flashed their eyes with angry gleam.

“The night is nearly past,” they said ;

“Hark, hear the clerics’ morning song !
What stupor filled your drowsy head ?
You’ve seemed to slumber with the dead—
Up, up ; ’twill be too late ere long !”

I rose and drew them both aside ;

I told my wondrous vision o’er—
“O brothers, wretched men,” I cried,
“Too long we’ve fought, with Hell allied,
Too long we’ve steeped our souls in gore.

“But well this blessed morn I know,
Though long by ways of crime enticed,
God dooms us not to endless woe ;
Our souls may yet be white as snow,
And we may see the face of Christ.”

Amazed they heard my story run ;

But could it be, they questioned long,
That God and His Eternal Son
Could pardon all the deeds we’d done
And take no vengeance for the wrong ?

I spoke the truths that Heaven instilled,
I bade them cast their doubts aside;
One soul to Hell, God never willed;
With love Christ's glowing heart was filled,
And Mary pleaded by His side.

They heard, they pondered, they believed—
Our hearts their olden union kept;
Well pleased the tidings they received,
Alike we wondered, feared, and grieved,
And, wild with hope and joy, we wept.

Up came the morn through brighter skies
Than ever lit our paths on earth;
Such gorgeous hues, such tender dyes
Were something strange, or else our eyes
Were dull and clouded from our birth.

Speckled with bright green streak and stain
The mountains gleamed like dinted brass,
A-near, o'er mound, and vale, and plain,
The golden sunlight poured amain,
And, lake-like, slept upon the grass.

Soft sang the wind from wood and hill,
Sweet came the river's mellow voice,
Loud rose the song-birds' merry trill,
The glorious harmony to fill,
And bid the waking world rejoice.

Oh, that fair morn ! it seemed as sent
Our new existence to begin ;
Forth to the blessed air we went,
Praying, with figures lowly bent,
For time to wash away our sin.

We saw him—and we rushed to meet—
Whose blood last night we would have spilt,
We cast ourselves before his feet,
We told him of our black deceit,
And craved forgiveness of our guilt.

“ My sons,” he said, “ God pardon you ;
By me, indeed, you are forgiven ;
Last eve your sinful thoughts I knew,
And for your sakes the whole night through
I knelt in fervent prayer to Heaven.

“And now I thank you, God above !

For this great boon, this high reward—
I thank you, Source of mighty Love,
I thank you, pure and stainless Dove !
I thank you, good and gentle Lord !

“Thy mercies fill our nights and days,
Our safety is Thy heart's desire,
And many are Thy wondrous ways
Our souls from sin's abyss to raise,
And save us from the pool of fire.

“O Son of Mary ! God's right hand !
O Fount of Life ! O fruitful Tree !
O shining Flower of Heaven's fair land !
O Light of Love ! O Day-star grand !
Thanks, thanks, and praise I give to Thee !”

We listened, weeping floods of tears,
Until he said—“O youths, arise !
Begin the penitential years,
Break up your blood-stained skians and spears,
And don the pilgrim's peaceful guise.

“Go forth ; thank God, on Irish ground
You need not travel far to meet
His priests, and hear His praise resound,
And see by many a vale and mound
Devotion's home and Learning's seat.

“But travel fast and pray the while,
And still ask Christ your souls to guard,
Till, after many a weary mile,
You reach the glory of the Isle,
Amid the green woods of Clonard—

“Where good St. Finnen calmly sways
With counsels firm and prudent rule—
A scene to love, a sight to praise,
The boast of Ireland's Christian days—
A city rather than a school.

“There students reading midst the trees
Have come from far in many ships,
And sages crowding round his knees
Like children listen, glad to seize
And store the wise words from his lips.

“ And those are masters, fit to teach
Great truths to nations far and wide ;
And these are saints who yet shall preach,
Where'er their missioned feet can reach,
The Man-God, born and crucified.

“ Go forward to that peaceful vale,
In whose calm heart the abbey stands,
At Finnen's feet your sins bewail—
Go, tell him all your wondrous tale,
And ask your penance at his hands.”

We wept our gratitude aloud ;
He bless'd us with extended arms—
We moved away, our heads low bowed,
We passed the towns, we shunned the crowd,
To spare the people fresh alarms.

We heard the victor's cry of pride,
We heard the jovial huntsman's horn,
Through emerald glades on either side,
Saw queenly figures slowly glide,
And eye our pilgrim garb with scorn.

We prayed to Christ our souls to guard,
Lest Hell might find our purpose faint ;
We passed by prince, and chief, and bard ;
We stayed not ; forward to Clonard
We pressed to meet the gracious Saint.

Girt with his scholars round about
At last we saw the holy man ;
They knew us—straight a fearful shout—
“O'Corra's Sons !” rang wildly out,
And from the Saint away they ran.

He did not share their wild affright,
He fled us not, but on he came—
A mild old man of stately height,
In whose clear eyes deep shone the light
That blest a soul all free from blame.

From his calm face, sun-stained and brown,
Far flowed his beard ; his snowy locks
Spread rippling on his coarse black gown,
Like wintry stream that tumbles down,
And whitens o'er a ledge of rocks.

He spoke—"What came ye, men, to seek—
Your ways have long been ways of strife?"
Oh, holy Saint, I dared to speak,
With altered hearts, with spirits meek,
We come to lead a better life.

Long, long in pits of sin we've dwelt,
And long in paths of blood we've trod;
Yet even our cruel hearts could melt
To stormy sorrow when we felt
The promptings of the love of God.

And now we've come to learn of you
All truths by Christ to mortals taught,
And what we yet on earth may do—
In penance for the crimes we rue,
The fearful wrongs our hands have wrought.

"God's will is here," Saint Finnen said;
"I will not send you from my door;
Come with me, sons," and on he led
Our steps to where his people fled,
And there he told our wishes o'er.

Awhile apart in counsel grave

The brethren spoke, then called us near,
A "soul's-friend" from the group they gave,
And bade us hold no converse, save
With this instructor, for a year.

Oh, happy year—oh, glorious time—

Oh, season bright with heavenly flowers,
When, linking like a wondrous rhyme,
Truth after truth, profound, sublime,
Flashed on us with the golden hours.

And all God's merciful design,

Clear and more clear our souls could see,
As proof on proof of love divine
Swept onward in a dazzling line
From Bethlehem to Calvary.

O gentle Saviour, only then

The sweetness of Thy heart we knew,
And why God's vengeance spared us, when
We heard Thy prayer for wicked men,
Thy plea, "They know not what they do."

And then with eyes of faith we saw

Thy servants pass o'er land and flood,
With hearts untouched by mortal awe,
Teach through the world Thy holy law,
And seal their mission with their blood.

We saw Thy Church rise strong and fair,
And centr'ing firm in holy Rome
Still send her children far and near,
Send blessed saints to Erin dear,
And win to God our island home.

That happy year ! like light it sped—

And when we sought the Saint again :
“ Go forth into the land,” he said,
“ Where long your names were names of dread,
And make amends to injured men.

“ You cannot bring the priests you killed
Back to those woods, and hills, and plains,
But where their guileless blood was spilled,
This haste to do : repair, rebuild,
The broken schools, the ruined fanes.”

The words but spoke our souls' intent—

 'The wish, the hope our breasts had nurst ;
Then gathering helpers as we went,
To Tuam's church our way we bent,
 And built that sacred pile the first.

And so we passed and wrought where e'er

 Our crimes were done in days of old,
We found the temples black and bare,
We left them decked with carvings rare,
 And altars all a-blaze with gold.

And when our course was nearly run

 We sought the holy Saint once more ;
We told him of our labours done—
The churches builded, all but one,
 Far distant on Kinvara's shore.

“Go, sons,” he said, “from hence away,
 To far Kinvara travel fast.

Saint Coman's Church by Galway Bay
Was not the house, your hearts should say,
 To leave a ruin to the last.

“ My blessing on your steps attend !

And when the good old man you see,
Tell him I asked him to befriend
Your souls, and guide them to the end ;
For death, I know, draws near to me.”

We kissed his hands, and forth we hied ;
To Galway's coast our steps we turned,
And soon above the dark blue tide
The church towered up in stately pride,
And grander than the church we burned.

Then kneeling on the verdant sod
That witnessed once our hideous crime,
We thanked the good and patient God
Who raised not His avenging rod,
But spared us to this happy time.

Saint Coman raised and kissed us three,
And forth we walked, with hearts elate,
On to the green slopes o'er the sea,
Where, through the tranquil evening, we
Talked o'er our lot with calm debate.

The sun was low, the winds were hushed,
And, rippling with a thousand smiles,
The bright-faced ocean glowed and blushed
To where, in purpling shadows flushed,
High towered the holy Arran Isles.

White sea-birds passed the steepes of Clare,
And floated by the Galway cliffs,
And on the shaded waters there
Like sleepers sheltered from the glare,
Slow rolled and dipped the fisher skiffs.

I said, O Saint, within my breast,
Strong and more strong the wish has grown,
To sail this great sea to the west
In search of lands as yet unblest,
Where Christ Our Lord was never known.

“Brothers,” said Ennié, “let us go
Unfearing on the boundless deep,
To bear Christ’s message to and fro,
Or, if God’s will decrees it so,
Down in its tranquil heart to sleep.

“There’s something yet to see, to hear,
Some saving knowledge to be won
Out in that crimson distance, where
Day after day, through year on year,
Mysterious, sinks the glowing sun.”

Spake Sylvester, with upraised eyes :

“Oh, brothers, dear, we cannot stay,
Strange whispers from the waves arise,
Strange meanings fill the wild birds’ cries ;
God calls us—let us hence away.”

“Sons,” said the Saint, “you’ve spoken well,
Your words are worthy of your race.
With zeal no toil or pain can quell,
They haste o’er land and sea, to tell
Of Christ, and Mary full of grace.

“Go build a currach stout and strong,
With tough ash ribs ; three lays of hides
Strain round her timbers, and along,
Fast bind her seams with cord and thong,
And coat with fat her sounding sides.

“Then fitted well with pole and oar,
Slight tapering mast and shapely sails,
Launch boldly out from Galway's shore,
Heed not the distant breakers' roar,
Fear not the howl of fresh'ning gales.

“And when along the heaving bay,
Steered for the main, I see you pass,
That God may guard you well I'll pray,
And for your sakes to Christ that day
I'll offer up His holy Mass.”

We got the currach builded so,
And for the work this price we paid—
That with us on our course should go
To share our fate for joy or woe,
The workman, in the boat he made.

Scarce had she touched the water, when
A poor wretch joined us from the strand ;
A bishop and two holy men
Next came into our craft, and then
We rowed and sailed her from the land.

We glided past the headlands bold,
Swept safely by the sounding caves,
And felt our blood run slow and cold,
When first our slender vessel rolled,
Lapped in the long Atlantic waves.

We passed the holy islands :—three
Great harps to God for ever strung,
Great altars lifted in the sea,
From whose high steps incessantly
The sound of prayer and praises rung.

We left them sinking far behind ;
Yet as we topped the steep sea-swells,
While calm the summer day declined,
The clerics' songs came on the wind,
And sweetly pealed the distant bells.

And when at last we could descry
But ocean round us waste and bare,
We raised our oars, and laid them by :
We knew no course beneath the sky,
And we were bound we knew not where.

Night blackened round us ; not a spark
From Heaven shone o'er the seething waves,
Where fell and groped our trembling bark,
As mortals straying in the dark,
Might stumble through a field of graves.

So all this weary night we passed,
Wetted with brine, and chill with dread,
And when the heavens grew white at last,
We saw our boat was rushing fast,
But yet we knew not where she sped.

For forty nights and forty days
We drifted o'er the desert sea ;
And then far off through mist and haze
Land, land, rose to our longing gaze,
And towards its shore quick hurried we.

We neared the isle—But, God ! what tones
Were those that filled the sickening air !
Quick sobs, and long-drawn piteous moans,
Heart-rending shrieks, and deep low groans,
As if all griefs were gathered there !

One of our party leaped to land,
 We bade him back—a vain request ;
He hurried o'er the weedy strand,
He mixed among the sorrowing band,
 And soon was moaning like the rest.

We rowed not far across the tide,
 When spent to death, one oarsman fell ;
The bishop blessed him as he died ;
Above his corse aloud we cried,
 Lamenting, for we loved him well.

And while we spoke each loving word,
 And sung the keener's doleful note,
A something near us flashed and stirred—
We turned—and lo ! a shining bird
 Perched on the gunwale of the boat !

“What hap is here that thus you weep?”
 'Twas so its warbled query ran.
“O bird,” we said, “our woe is deep,
For here, in death's eternal sleep,
 A good friend lies, a faithful man.”

“Then mourn no more ; his soul am I,
God's mercies make me pure and bright ;
A little time, and hence I fly
To live with Christ the Lord on high,”
It said, and vanished from our sight.

We marvelled much ; but soon the breeze
Blew wildly, and through waves upcurled,
We rushed to isles in stormy seas,
Where men were pained in like degrees
To their wrong doings in the world.

Upon one isle, from all apart,
A cleric ceaseless prayed and read.
We asked what grief was at his heart ;
He heard our words with painful start,
And this was what the cleric said.

He launched a boat, and here was flung,
When banished from his holy freres ;
For oft when matin bells were rung
He hymned his hymns with idle tongue,
Or slept away the time of pray'rs.

Elsewhere a peasant dug the soil
With hand and foot that could not tire,
The blood seemed in his veins to boil,
Yet still went on his fearful toil—
The spade he held was solid fire.

This tale he told : he had not paid
Due heed to God's express command ;
When Sundays came he never laid
His tools aside ; he took his spade
And dug and delved upon his land.

Another isle ; its surface glowed
With burning sands and fiery gorse,
And ever through that dread abode,
A hapless mortal, screaming, rode,
His legs astride a flaming horse.

He passed us in a moment's span,
He came and went with lightning speed ;
We learned his story ; as he ran,
He owned his crime—the wretched man
On earth had stolen his neighbour's steed.

Another isle ! and oh, the shrieks

Of tortured crowds ; the rush, the rout,
While huge black birds, with fiery beaks
And talons, tore their breasts and cheeks,
And cast the quivering flesh about.

The mortals in that fearful plight,

When trading in the world abroad,
Had measures short and balance light,
Had wronged and robbed by day and night,
And pinched the poor with many a fraud.

Off with the wind our currach swung,

But sad the sight where next we came—
In each man's head a burning tongue,
Like bar of melting iron hung,
And each man's breath was sheeted flame.

And these were men whose joy had been

To speak the things by God abhorred ;
Whose pleasures lay in tales obscene,
In shameful jests, and songs unclean,
In horrid oath and filthy word.

Away we sailed again, away ;
The isles of torture sank astern,
And soon across the gleaming spray
Rose-tinted with a brighter day,
Another shore we could discern.

Bright birds in flocks came winging by,
Like portions of the sunset clouds,
One, gorgeous-hued, from far on high,
Swept slowly down, and circling nigh,
At last it lighted on our shrouds.

“ Oh, set our trembling souls at rest,
Dear bird,” we said, “ your message tell—
Why thus in crimson plumage drest,
Why those three sun-streaks on your breast
What are we doomed to—Heaven or Hell ?”

“ I am a soul from Ireland sped ;
I did three acts of charity,
They flashed across the life I led,
As o'er the darker crimson spread
The rings of dazzling light you see.

“Not with the damned your doom is cast ;
Your toils and pains are nearely o’er.”
So spoke the bird and sudden pass’d—
’Twas happy news ; our hearts beat fast,
And, filled with joy, we wept once more.

We spread our sail, and rowing still,
We came to fragrant isles and fair ;
Good princes, men of gentle will,
And chiefs who turned from deeds of ill
To serve the Lord, were gathered there.

The shrubs rained down a honey dew,
Sweet wine-like rivers laved their roots ;
Soft music swept the green woods through,
And birds of dazzling plumage flew
Midst branches bright with flowers and fruits.

One sound of that delightful strain,
That from their happy breasts arose,
To men sore hurt in heart or brain,
Or women in their direst pain,
Would bring oblivion of their woes.

We rowed into a calm retreat ;
We leaped upon the jewelled sand ;
We hastened towards the waters sweet,
And glowing fruit : we quaffed and eat,
And rested on the happy land.

And when some days and nights had rolled
Their wondrous joys and glories past,
There came a sage, calm-faced and old,
Who with his lips of wisdom told
Our duties forward to the last.

“Go forth,” he said, “upon the main ;
A little while and you shall see
Uprising, like a purple stain,
The mountains and the coast of Spain—
There shall your homes, O'Corras, be.

“Kneel down in grateful prayer and praise
When first you touch the verdant sward,
And on that spot in after days,
As high as human hands can raise,
Build up a temple to the Lord.

“Your fame shall reach to Erin yet,
And while the Shannon seaward runs,
And Connaught's coast with brine is wet,
Your land shall hear, and not forget
The story of O'Corra's sons.”

We left the isle, we crossed the main,
We built the temple grand and tall,
And here upon the coast of Spain
Our peaceful lives are on the wane,
And calm we wait the end of all.

O holy Bishop, gracious youth,
'Tis yours to pass from hence to Rome ;
Tell you this tale of wondrous truth,
Of hope and fear, of joy and ruth,
To clerics from our native home—

That it may reach to Erin yet ;
And while the Shannon seaward runs,
And Connaught's coast with brine is wet,
Our land may hear, and not forget
The story of O'Corras sons.

DEATH OF KING
CONOR MAC NESSA.

DEATH OF KING CONOR MAC NESSA.

'Twas a day full of sorrow for Ulster when
Conor Mac Nessa went forth
To punish the clansmen of Connaught who
dared to take spoil from the North ;
For his men brought him back from the battle
scarce better than one that was dead,
With the brain ball of Mesgedra* buried two
thirds of its depth in his head.
His royal physician bent o'er him, great Fingen,
who often before
Staunched the war-battered bodies of heroes,
and built them for battle once more,

*The pagan Irish warriors sometimes took the brains out of champions whom they had slain in single combat, mixed them up with lime, and rolled them into balls, which hardened with time, and which they preserved as trophies. It was with one of these balls, which had been abstracted from his armoury, that Conor Mac Nessa was wounded, as described in the text.

And he looked on the wound of the monarch,
and heark'd to his low-breathèd sighs,
And he said, "In the day when that missile is
loosed from his forehead, he dies.

"Yet long midst the people who love him King
Conor Mac Nessa may reign,
If always the high pulse of passion be kept from
his heart and his brain ;
And for this I lay down his restrictions :—no
more from this day shall his place
Be with armies, in battles, or hostings, or lead-
ing the van of the chase ;
At night, when the banquet is flashing, his
measure of wine must be small,
And take heed that the bright eyes of woman
be kept from his sight above all ;
For if heart thrilling joyance or anger awhile
o'er his being have power,
The ball will start forth from his forehead, and
surely he dies in that hour."

Oh ! woe for the valiant King Conor, struck
down from the summit of life

While glory unclouded shone round him, and
regal enjoyment was rife—

Shut out from his toils and his duties, con-
demned to ignoble repose,

No longer to friends a true helper, no longer a
scourge to his foes !

He, the strong-handed smiter of champions, the
piercer of armour and shields,

The foremost in earth-shaking onsets, the last
out of blood-sodden fields—

The mildest, the kindest, the gayest, when
revels ran high in his hall—

Oh, well might his people who loved him feel
gloomy and sad for his fall !

The princes, the chieftains, the nobles, who
met to consult at his board,

Whispered low when their talk was of combats,
and wielding the spear and the sword ;

The bards from their harps feared to waken the
full-pealing sweetness of song,

To give homage to valour or beauty, or praise
to the wise and the strong ;

The flash of no joy-giving story made cheers or
gay laughter resound,
Amidst silence constrained and unwonted the
seldom filled wine-cup went round ;
And, sadder to all who remembered the glories
and joys that had been,
The heart-swaying presence of woman not once
shed its light on the scene.

He knew it, he felt it, and sorrow sank daily
more deep in his heart ;
He wearied of doleful inaction, from all his
loved labours apart.
He sat at his door in the sunlight, sore grieving
and weeping to see
The life and the motion around him, and
nothing so stricken as he.
Above him the eagle went wheeling, before him
the deer galloped by,
And the quick-leggèd rabbits went skipping from
green glades and burrows a-nigh,
The song-birds sang out from the copses, the
bees passed on musical wing,

And all things were happy and busy, save
Conor Mac Nessa, the King !

So years had passed over, when, sitting midst
silence like that of the tomb,
A terror crept through him as sudden the
noonlight was blackened with gloom.
One red flare of lightning blazed brightly, illum-
ing the landscape around,
One thunder-peal roared through the mountains,
and rumbled and crashed underground ;
He heard the rocks bursting asunder, the trees
tearing up by the roots,
And loud through the horrid confusion the
howling of terrified brutes.
From the halls of his tottering palace came
screamings of terror and pain,
And he saw crowding thickly around him the
ghosts of the foes he had slain !

As soon as the sudden commotion that shud-
dered through nature had ceased,
The King sent for Barach, his druid, and said :
“ Tell me truly, O priest,

What magical arts have created this scene of
wild horror and dread ?

What has blotted the blue sky above us, and
shaken the earth that we tread ?

Are the gods that we worship offended ? what
crime or what wrong has been done ?

Has the fault been committed in Erin, and
how may their favour be won ?

What rites may avail to appease them ? what
gifts on their altars should smoke ?

Only say, and the offering demanded we lay by
your consecrate oak."

"O King," said the white-bearded druid, "the
truth unto me has been shown,

There lives but *one* God, the Eternal ; far up
in high Heaven is his throne.

He looked upon men with compassion, and
sent from his kingdom of light

His Son, in the shape of a mortal, to teach
them and guide them aright.

Near the time of your birth, O King Conor, the
Saviour of mankind was born,

And since then in the kingdoms far eastward
he taught, toiled, and prayed, till this morn,
When wicked men seized him, fast bound him
with nails to a cross, lanced his side,
And that moment of gloom and confusion was
earth's cry of dread when he died.

“O King, he was gracious and gentle, his heart
was all pity and love,
And for men he was ever beseeching the grace
of his Father above ;
He helped them, he healed them, he blessed
them ; he laboured that all might attain
To the true God's high kingdom of glory, where
never comes sorrow or pain ;
But they rose in their pride and their folly,
their hearts filled with merciless rage,
That only the sight of his lifeblood fast poured
from his heart could assuage ;
Yet while on the cross-beams uplifted, his body
racked, tortured, and riven,
He prayed—not for justice or vengeance, but
asked that his foes be forgiven.”

With a bound from his seat rose King Conor,
the red flush of rage on his face,
Fast he ran through the hall for his weapons,
and snatching his sword from its place,
He rushed to the woods, striking wildly at
boughs that dropped down with each blow,
And he cried : " Were I midst the vile rabble,
I'd cleave them to earth even so !
With the strokes of a high King of Erin, the
whirls of my keen-tempered sword,
I would save from their horrible fury that mild
and that merciful Lord."
His frame shook and heaved with emotion ; the
brain-ball leaped forth from his head,
And commending his soul to that Saviour,
King Conor Mac Nessa fell dead.



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